

US Army Chaplain Center and School
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ISLAM AND THE MUSLIM SERVICEMAN

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PREFACE

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the Islamic religion by means of a two-fold presentation. The first section will present a general overview of the Islamic faith. The second section will seek to apply the findings of the first to the military situation. It is recognized that the first section is lengthy. This was necessary in order to provide a comprehensive background for the practical application. Section Two is presented as a pithy statement which could be developed into a Chaplain's SOP or Commander's Briefing.

This was not a difficult topic to research. I was able to obtain material through the USACHCS Library, personal interviews with Muslim individuals and materials from the Islamic Mission of America.

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ISLAM AND THE MUSLIM SERVICEMAN

Islam: An Overview of History, Beliefs, Duties, Ethics and Distinctive Practices

History

The religion of Islam arose in the seventh century A.D. under the inspiration and through the leadership of Muhammad. The influence of Christianity and Judaism is reflected in the writings and practices of Islam. The holy book of Islam is the Quran. Its contents were revealed to Muhammad in repeated visions in the year 610 A.D. Islam means submission to Allah, the God of Muhammad. The followers of this religion are called Muslims.¹

The Islamic religion became a political force after Muhammad's death as submission to Allah became the rallying theme of many of the nomadic Arab tribes. Today, over five hundred million people profess the Islamic faith. This number is found in North Africa, the Near and Middle East, Soviet Central Asia, Western China, the Malayan peninsula,

¹David G. Bradley, A Guide to the World's Religions (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963), p. 67.

Northern and Central India, Indonesia, and the Philippines.²

Beliefs

Five major beliefs are present in Islam. The Muslim must accept and subscribe to these without reservation.

The most crucial belief in Islam is that of Allah's unity of being. The Quran is implicit in its condemnation of those who suggest that Allah is more than one person.³ Allah has seven stated characteristics although it is maintained that his ultimate being cannot be fathomed by human reason.

Allah is absolute unity, all-seeing, all-hearing, all-speaking, all-knowing, all-willing, and all-powerful.⁴

Cosmology in Islam provides guardian angels who watch over a man and keep a strict record of his deeds which are used to determine his status at the time of final judgement. Other angels are keepers of

²Caesar E. Farah, Islam (Woodbury, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1970), pp. 5-6

³Ibid., p. 107.

⁴Bradley, World Religions, p. 71.

Hell and mediators between Allah and man.⁵

At the very core of Islam lies the Quran. This holy book of writings constitutes the Muslim's main reference not only for spiritual matters, but for every event of the day.⁶ The Quran was thought to have been delivered to Muhammad to provide the means by which to re-establish a pure religion out of that which had been defiled.⁷ The Quran then is considered to be the word of God. It has never been questioned by the true Muslim believer.⁸

A fourth article of faith is the acceptance of the twenty-eight prophets of Allah of which Muhammad was one. Most of these prophets are known to Christian and Jewish believers. For the Muslim, the last, the greatest, and the seal of prophesy is Muhammad.⁹

⁵Farah, Islam, p. 111.

⁶Ibid., p. 78.

⁷James Kritzeck, Sons of Abraham, Jews, Christians, Moslems (Baltimore, Maryland: Helicon Press, 1965), p. 29.

⁸John Alden Williams, Great Religions of Modern Man, Islam (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), p. 1.

⁹Bradley, World Religions, p. 71.

The Eschatological teachings of the Quran comprise the fifth article of faith for the Muslim. The Muslim must profess faith in the resurrection of the body, the final judgement, and the final destiny in Heaven or Hell as determined by Allah.

"Heaven is a man's paradise. Hell is the abode of those who oppose the teachings of Muhammad and the will of Allah." 10

Duties

"I bear witness that there is no God (whatsoever) but God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God." These words, the first spoken into the ear of the new born babe and the last from the lips of the dying, constitutes the most important and often repeated words of faith for the Muslim.¹¹

This statement of faith makes one a Muslim. This profession of faith is the first of five duties which must be performed and which support the faith of the Muslim community. Other duties incumbent upon

¹⁰Ibid., p. 71.

¹¹Farah, Islam, p. 134.

the Muslim are the Salah, ritual prayers, Zakat, alms giving, Sawm, fasting, and Hajj, the religious pilgrimage.

The Salah is an essential obligation of the Muslim in worship and the supreme act of righteousness. "Muhammad placed greater importance on prayer than on any other religious duty." Prayer for the Muslim consists of readings from the Quran, confessions of faith, moments of personal meditation, and of the benediction or petition for the prophet. Prayer is offered according to a definite pattern five times daily: at dawn, midday, midafternoon, sunset and nightfall.¹²

Before prayer the Muslim observes a prescribed cleansing ritual. The hands and arms to the elbows, the mouth and nostrils, the face and the head, and finally the feet to the ankles are washed. Running water is preferred, but if unavailable sand or clean earth may be used in the ablution.¹³

If a mosque is available, the service of prayers should be

¹²Ibid., p. 78.

¹³Kenneth Cragg, The Call of the Minaret (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 108.

observed there.¹⁴ The Friday midday service is considered the major gathering of the Muslim community for corporate worship. Muslim shops are closed during this hour and reopened thereafter.¹⁵

Zabak is the Muslims giving back to Allah a portion of what he has given the man as a means of avoiding the sufferings of the next world and as an expiation for what the Muslim retains for himself of material possessions.¹⁶

Swan, the fast, is to be observed in the month of Ramadan. During this time the Muslim must refrain from partaking of food or drink and abstain from sexual relations during the time, "when a white thread may be distinguished from a black one before sunrise until sunset." ¹⁷ If a Muslim fails to fast he may compensate for his failure by feeding

¹⁴D.A. Faisal, Allah Our Lord is One (New York: By the Author, Unknown), p. 15.

¹⁵Luther Driver, "Questions on the Religion of Islam," New York, 1973, p. 3. (Mimeographed).

¹⁶Farah, Islam, p. 141.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 144.

a poor man. He may compensate for his sexual excess by freeing a slave, fasting two months, or feeding sixty persons. Depending upon the month in which Ramadan falls, the fast may last from twenty-eight to thirty days. The completion of the fast is celebrated by a time of festival. This is one of the most warmly and strictly observed holidays in Islam.¹⁸

The fifth duty of the Muslim is the Haji or pilgrimage to the sacred monuments of Mecca. This trip is required of all who are physically fit and financially able. The trip should be conducted during a prescribed period of the Muslim year. Special considerations are made for those physically or financially unable to make the trip. Often a proxy may make the trip in the place of one physically unable to go.¹⁹

Ethics

"Like Judaism, Islam is a religion not only of a book, but also of a law regulating the day to day living of its believers." ²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 144-145.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 145-147.

²⁰Kritzack, Sons of Abraham, p. 43.

Implicit moral obligations are dictated for the Muslim by the Quran. Among those stressed are gratitude, kindness towards parents and respect for parents, honesty in transactions, truth in commitments, loyalty, humility, and peaceful relations with others. Kindness and consideration for orphans and the needy is taught as a fulfillment of religious duty. Usury is condemned as is deceitfulness and the desire to cheat or swindle. Waste and wantonness is considered the work of the devil in man.²¹

The dietary laws of Islam are similar to those in Judaism. Eating swine's flesh is forbidden as is the drinking of alcoholic beverages.²² The eating of meat of any animal that has died of natural causes is prohibited. Other prohibited items include blood and that which has been dedicated to any other god than Allah.²³ In actual practice, the flesh of all animals not slaughtered in the prescribed

²¹Parah, Islam, pp. 122-134.

²²Bradley, World's Religions, p. 74.

²³Faisal, Allah Our Lord is One, p. 15.

manner is unclean although in an emergency anything edible is considered lawful.²⁴

In instances where Muslim prepared food is not available and Jewish Kosher food is, the Jewish food may be eaten by the Muslim in good faith.²⁵

Swearing by the divining arrow is an unlawful act for the Muslim. Also prohibited is any game of chance to include any type of gambling.²⁶

"Righteousness in Islam consists in leading a life of complete harmony with divine attributes." ²⁷

Distinctive Practices

In Islam practice the body of a deceased believer must be ritually prepared for burial. The procedure includes washing and ablu-

²⁴A.S. Tritton, Islam, Belief and Practices (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966), p. 129.

²⁵Quran, Surah V : 5

²⁶Faisal, Allah Our Lord is One, pp. 14-15.

²⁷D.A. Faisal, Allah the Lord Our God is One (New York: By the Author, Unknown), p. 33.

tion of the body. Prayers over the dead must be said by a qualified Muslim. At no time is an autopsy or cremation of the body allowed.²⁸ The matter of time between death and burial is crucial for the Muslim. Burial should follow death by no more than twenty-four hours.²⁹ Autopsies and cremation are prohibited because Muslims believe that the body must go to the grave whole and without missing parts.³⁰

The major holidays in Islam are two. The Ramadan Feast celebrates the close of the month-long Fast. The completion of the pilgrimage to Mecca is celebrated by a feast at which time a lamb or sheep is sacrificed. Of the sacrificed meat, seventy-five percent is given to the poor. Both festivals last three to four days and are considered important occasions in the social life of the Muslim community.³¹

The Ramadan Fast in 1973 will be observed from 28 September

²⁸Faisal, Allah Our Lord is One, p. 16.

²⁹Tritton, Islam, p. 136.

³⁰Luther Driver, private interview held at Fort Hamilton, New York, October 1973.

³¹Driver, "Questions on Islam," p. 6.

through 27 October with the Ramadan Feast celebrated on 28 October.³²

There are no clergy or priests in Islam. The spiritual leaders are known as Imams. These individuals are selected by the Muslim community because of their knowledge of the Quran and Muslim law or because of their kind and pious lives.³³ A person other than a Muslim is not allowed to pray over the body of a deceased Muslim.³⁴ If a Muslim cannot be found when the death of a Muslim occurs, one should contact the nearest Mosque or Muslim association to seek assistance and further guidance.³⁵

Some Muslims wear beards and turban head dress. These items are worn as the pious Muslim seeks to adhere strictly to the teachings of the Muslim tradition as found in the sunna. One recorder of tradition wrote, "Keep beards and leave the mustache." ³⁶ The pious Muslim may also wear a turban wrapped around a small skull-type hat called the kufi. An observer of Muslim tradition quotes Muhammad as saying,

³²Driver, private interview.

³³Driver, "Questions on Islam," p. 3.

³⁴Faisal, Allah Our Lord is One, p. 15.

³⁵Driver, "Questions on Islam," p. 5.

³⁶Muhammad Ashrat, Mishkat Al-Masabih (Lahore: Kashmiri Bazar, 1970), p. 358.

"Turbans wound around hats are what distinguish us from the polytheists." 37

Islam: Providing Religious Coverage
for the Muslim Serviceman

The military chaplain may be requested by his commander to provide for the religious needs and requirements of Muslim personnel within his command. In order to accomplish this task the chaplain not only must be knowledgeable about the Muslim faith, but also must consider concrete ways and means by which to meet the distinctive needs and requirements of this group.

The distinctive nature of this faith group cannot be disputed. A number of needs and requirements must be dealt with constructively if the Muslim is to participate in the military service.

The requirement for the Muslim to pray five times daily seems most crucial. For the Muslim, the Salah, is the expression of his devotion and worship of Allah. In theory, the Muslim may offer his prayers at the appropriate times wherever he happens to be. In practice, it would seem that the Muslim would have difficulty in fulfilling this required act of worship while in basic training where time is at

³⁷Arthur Jeffery, ed., A Reader on Islam (New York: Mouton and Co., 1962), p. 136.

a premium and privacy a rarity. In this setting the man's treatment would depend largely upon the acceptance and understanding of his religious requirements by leadership personnel. The chaplain should rightly advise these men of the peculiar needs of the Muslim serviceman. In other settings, the Muslim would have little difficulty in fulfilling the obligation.

At nearly any post, a military chapel could be made available for the Muslim's devotional duties. The facility could also be used for the Friday midday service. The Muslim would probably request the use of a room other than the sanctuary in a chapel in that his worship requires the use of an austere setting. The commander should be advised of the Muslim's obligation to attend Friday midday services. It would be understood that he could return to duty after the service.

The dietary requirements present a second crucial adjustment for the Muslim serviceman. Assuming that much of the food prepared in military mess halls is cooked using a pork base shortening, this food would be considered unclean for the Muslim. If the Muslim ate in a typical mess hall, he would have to be very selective in his eating. Other possible solutions would be for the Muslim to eat with the Orthodox Jews in their Kosher Kitchen. Most installations provide this facility for Jewish personnel. The Muslim might be placed on separate rations which would allow him to purchase and prepare his own food.

The observance of the Ramadan Fast is a further obligation of the Muslim. In fulfilling this requirement the Muslim would be unable to eat during the daylight hours for a month-long period of time. If the man was following an exerting physical program this could be a difficult experience. When performing a more sedentary task the fast would not be trying. In either case, the man could eat before sunup and after sundown. The Muslim might choose to substitute another act of piety for the fast as allowed by Muslim law.

The pious Muslim may wish to wear a beard and turban as suggested by Muslim tradition. This should present little difficulty if the man will submit a request to wear the items on the basis of religious practice and faith. The chaplain could assist the man in preparing his request.

One of the Muslim's major holidays would require his attendance and participation. The feast of the Ramadan celebrated at the close of the Ramadan Fast should be attended by the Muslim, if possible. It would seem that this would require only a request for permission to attend the holiday with appropriate documentation attached. Again, the chaplain could assist the man in preparing this request. The second holiday would not apply in that it is held in conjunction with the holy pilgrimage from which the serviceman would be exempt during his military service.

A major concern of the chaplain and commander would be making the preparations for a unit memorial service. In the event of the death of a Muslim while on active duty, after the appropriate notification of next of kin, it would seem likely that the family would make arrangements for the formal funeral service. If a unit memorial service was conducted, this service should be of a military/patriotic type as provided for in AR 165-20, paragraph 3f. The service should be conducted by line officers without Holy Scripture and prayers. It should be held in a location other than a chapel sanctuary.

A further consideration is the Muslim's participation in military social activities. It should be recognized that the faithful Muslim must abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages. This man, like any other, should be provided the opportunity to choose the social activities in which he desires to participate.

A final consideration is the provision of Muslim Imams to counsel and provide services for the Muslim serviceman. There are no Muslim chaplains in the military since the Muslim faith has no ordained clergy. If Muslim men are assigned to a unit, the chaplain should attempt to find a Muslim lay leader to provide religious guidance for the men of this faith. If no mosque is available, the chaplain should seek assistance from a Muslim organization in the

area. Muslim centers are located in most metropolitan areas.

It is my opinion that the Muslim serviceman would experience little difficulty in the military if he was flexible and highly motivated toward military service.

The military chaplain can assist the Muslim in discovering the means for fulfilling his religious duties and responsibilities.

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